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Condominiums are projected for a heavily polluted Superfund site on Waukegan's lakefront that is targeted for a \$27 million cleanup to be paid by two private companies.

Under a proposed agreement announced Thursday by the U.S. Justice Department on behalf of federal and state environmental officials, North Shore Gas and General Motors would pay for the cleanup. The companies are former owners of the 36 acres east of Grand Avenue and the Amstutz Expressway in downtown Waukegan.

U.S. and Illinois Environmental Protection Agency officials described the contaminated land as the Waukegan Manufactured Gas and Coke Plant Superfund site. The property is part of the larger Outboard Marine Corp. Superfund site.

However, Outboard Marine is defunct, which is why General Motors and North Shore Gas would pay the \$27 million in cleanup costs, said Ray Vukovich, Waukegan's director of governmental services.

Vukovich said the cleanup is expected to start in October and continue through winter, provided the proposed settlement is finalized. After the cleanup, the 36 acres would be suitable for a proposed 500-unit lakefront condominium project, he said.

Waukegan purchased the land for \$100,000, so having General Motors and North Shore Gas cover the \$27 million cleanup tab is good news for residents, Vukovich said.

"We've gotten the short end of the stick so many times," Vukovich said. "This is a good one."

Vukovich said the city plans to select a residential developer when the cleanup begins.

From 1908 to 1971, the 36-acre site tucked between Waukegan Harbor and Lake Michigan was at times a creosote wood-treating facility, manufactured gas plant and industrial coke facility, according to the proposed agreement filed in U.S. District Court.

Outboard Marine used the land for hazardous waste storage, public parking, snowmobile testing and fire training from 1972 to 1989.

Court documents state the various industrial operations on the land triggered releases of hazardous substances, including polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons.

Gas and coke manufacturing resulted in arsenic, phenols, thiocyanate and ammonia seeping into Lake Michigan and Waukegan Harbor. Also affected were soil, groundwater and sediments., according to court documents

In September 1993, the federal EPA placed the site on a national priority list for cleanup based on a "relative risk of danger to public health or welfare or the environment."

One congressman who has been pushing for environmental cleanup efforts in Waukegan and along Lake Michigan said he was excited about the proposed settlement.

Republican U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk of Highland Park said Thursday's announcement was an "essential step" in the long-discussed redevelopment of Waukegan's lakefront.